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ABSTRACT

This study investigated differences in learning styles, anxiety levels, and coping techniques in traditional (under age 25 years) versus nontraditional (age 25 years or older) community college students. In the fall of 1997, traditional and nontraditional students completed tests on their learning styles, general anxiety levels, and coping techniques. The instruments used were the Group Assessment of Logical Thinking (GALT), the General Anxiety Scale (GAS), and the Coping Techniques Questionnaire. Students were categorized as having formal, transitional, or concrete learning styles. Results showed a high number of concrete learners among both traditional and nontraditional students. There was a significant correlation between formal learners' high anxiety levels and their use of negative coping techniques as measured by the Coping Techniques Questionnaire. Transitional learners displayed a positive correlation between anxiety levels and negative coping skills. Traditional students designated as concrete learners had a significant correlation between concrete learning style and use of negative coping skills. Nontraditional students designated as formal learners had significant correlations in all areas. Nontraditional students who were transitional learners showed no significant differences. The three appendixes include the General Anxiety Scale, the Coping Techniques Questionnaire, and four tables. (Contains 9 references.) (SM)

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A Comparison of Learning Styles and Coping Techniques

in

Traditional and Nontraditional Community College Students

by

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Wallace Community College

Dothan, Alabama

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A Comparison of Learning Styles and Coping Techniques in Traditional and Nontraditional Community College Students

by

Elsa C. Price, Ed.D.

Students of all ages, traditional students who are less than twenty five years old and non traditional students who are twenty five years old or older attend community colleges. They arrive with diverse backgrounds, learning techniques, coping techniques, life experiences and a variety of expectations ranging from that of obtaining a greater general understanding and appreciation of life to that of obtaining specific technical skills equipping them to enter the work force. To meet the challenges created by these diversities the admissions office along with the counseling center require the students to take placement tests so that each student can be advised adequately.

Within the classroom setting the instructors may choose to administer learning styles instruments to identify the student's learning styles and with that knowledge organize their presentations so that the students will have successful learning experiences. There are several learning styles instruments available such as The Learning and Study Strategies Inventory (LASSI) (Weinstein, et.al., 1987) which can be used to assess ten different areas related to the student's learning and study styles. A second instrument is the GALT (Group Assessment of Logical Thinking) developed by Roadrangka, et.al. (1983) following Piaget's theory of cognitive thinking. The GALT identifies the student's learning as either concrete, transitional, or formal. When the instructor knows the student's learning styles then he/she can adapt classroom presentations to suit those learning styles thereby enabling students to understand scientific concepts and increase their reasoning abilities.

Some of the characteristics of the GALT include:

1. The test measures six logical operations: conservation, proportional reasoning, controlling variables, combinational reasoning, probabilistic reasoning, and correlational reasoning;
2. The test uses a multiple-choice format for presenting options for answers as well as the justification reason for that answer;
3. Pictorial representations of real objects are employed in all test items;

4. The test is suitable for students reading at the sixth grade level or higher;
5. The test has sufficient reliability and validity to distinguish between groups of students at concrete, transitional, and formal stages of development; and,
6. The test can be administered in one class period to a large group by individuals who serve simply as proctors (Roadrangka, et. al., 1983.)

In their development of the GALT, Roadrangka, et. al. (1983) noted that there was a general increase in cognitive ability with grade and age increase but that "the majority of middle school students exhibit conservation skills and High school students have gained in these skills but show the same pattern of weaknesses. The majority of college students exhibit probabilistic reasoning skills" (p.9). As to the learning styles of most students interviewed and tested with the GALT, more than fifty percent were concrete learners. Several suggestions were given which would enable teachers to better present material to the concrete learner.
these suggestions include the following:

I. Organizing Information

   A. Note-Taking
   B. Obtaining material from texts
      1. Overview
      2. Identification of information/ideas
         a. sequencing of events
         b. causal relationships
         c. listing without order
         d. comparing information
         e. defining terms

II. Assimilating Information

   A. Computer Assisted Instruction
      1. Tutorials
      2. Simulations
      3. Reviews, Sample Tests, Study Guides
      4. Word processing
      5. Collecting and analyzing data

B. Cooperative Learning (Peer Modeling)
   1. Peer Matching By Level of Reasoning ability
   2. Time on Task
   3. Thinking Out Loud

C. Concept Mapping
   1. Individual
   2. Small Groups

D. Problem Solving and Comprehension
   1. Problem Translation
   2. Problem Integration
   3. Solution Planning and Monitoring
   4. Solution Execution (Roadrangka, et. al., 1983)

Students not only display different learning styles, they have different levels of anxiety (stress) and a variety of ways to handle or cope with the stress they experience at school and in their day to day activities. Some coping techniques have a negative effect on the person causing other problems, i.e. smoking a cigarette to "calm down" or having and alcoholic drink to "relax". More positive coping techniques will have long range effects that are not harmful to the body, i.e., walking or moderate aerobic exercise, gardening, reading, or playing with their cat, dog or other household pets.

Student's anxiety levels can be measured through a variety of instruments. The General Anxiety Scale by Sarason (1962) is a 17 item questionnaire which is easily administered and has a high level of reliability. The higher the score for this test the higher the anxiety level of the testee.

The Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997) contains twenty questions rated on a scale from 0=Never, 1=Rarely, 2=Occasionally, 3=Frequently, 4=Always/Constantly and N/A= Does Not Apply. Nine of the questions indicate negative coping techniques, nine indicate positive coping techniques and two are neutral. The instrument is scored by summing the numerical answers for each category of responses.

The Study

In the fall of 1997 Wallace Community College science class students both traditional (under twenty-five) and nontraditional (twenty-five and older) were tested as to their learning styles, general anxiety levels, and coping techniques. The instruments used were the GALT test (Roadrangka, et.al., 1983) the General Anxiety Scale (Sarason, 1963) (Appendix A), and the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997,) (Appendix B) respectively. The investigation was designed to answer questions regarding differences in learning styles, anxiety levels and coping techniques in traditional students (under twenty-five), and nontraditional students (twenty-five and older).

The questions are as follows:

1. Did being a traditional or nontraditional student contribute to each student's learning style as measured by the GALT (Rodrangki, et,al., 1983)?

2. Did being a traditional or nontraditional student contribute to each student's anxiety level as measured by the GALT (Rodrangke, et,al., 1983)?

3. Did being a traditional or nontraditional student contribute to each student's selection of positive coping techniques as measured by the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997)?

4. Did being a traditional or nontraditional student contribute to each student's selection of negative coping techniques as measured by the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997)?

5. When grouped by formal learning style as designated on the GALT (Rodrangki, et,al.,1983), did being a traditional or nontraditional student contribute to each student's anxiety level as measured by the GAS (Sarason, 1961)?

6. When grouped by the transitional learning style as designated on the GALT (Rodrangki,et,al., 1983), did being a traditional or nontraditional student contribute to each student's anxiety level as measured by the GAS (Sarason, 1961)?

7. When grouped by the concrete learning style as designated on the GALT (Rodrangki, et,al.,1983), did being a traditional or nontraditional student contribute to each student's anxiety level as measured by the GAS (Sarason, 1961)?

8. When grouped by the Formal learning style as designated on the GALT (Rodrangki, et,al.,1983), did being a traditional or nontraditional student contribute to each student's selection of positive coping techniques as measured on the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997)?

9. When grouped by the Transitional learning style as designated on the GALT (Rongranki, et,al.,1983), did being a traditional or nontraditional student contribute to each student's selection of positive coping techniques as measured on the Coping Techniques questionnaire (Price, 1997)?

10. When grouped by the Concrete learning style as designated on the GALT (Rodgranki,et,al.,1983) being a traditional or nontraditional student contribute to each student's selection of positive coping techniques as measured on the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997)?

11. When grouped by the Formal learning style as designated on the GALT (Rodrangki, et,al., 1983) did being a traditional or nontraditional student contribute to each student's selection of negative coping techniques as measured on the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997)?

12. When grouped by the Transitional learning style as designated on the GALT (Rodrangki,et,al., 1983) did being a traditional or nontraditional student contribute to each student's selection of negative coping techniques as measured on the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997)?

13. When grouped by the Concrete learning style as designated on the GALT (Rodrangka, et,al., 1983) did being a traditional or nontraditional student contribute to each student's selection of negative coping techniques as measured on the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997)?

14. Is there a correlation between student's learning styles as identified on the GALT (Rodrangki, et,al.,1983) and the student's anxiety levels as measured by the GAS (Sarason, 1961) in either traditional or non traditional students?

15. Is there a correlation between the student's learning styles as identified on the GALT (Rodrangki, et,al.,1983) and student's negative coping techniques as measured by the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997) in either traditional or nontraditional students?

16. Is there a correlation between student's learning styles as identified on the GALT (Rodrangki, et,al., 1983) and the student's positive coping techniques as measured in the Coping Techniques Questionnaire(Price, 1997) in either traditional or nontraditional students?

17. Is there a correlation between student's anxiety levels as measured on the GAS (Sarason, 1961) and negative coping techniques as measured by the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997) in either traditional or nontraditional students?

18. Is there a correlation between student's anxiety levels as measured by GAS (Sarason, 1961), and positive coping techniques, as measured in the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997), in either traditional or nontraditional students?

NULL HYPOTHESES

The research questions stated above led to the following null hypotheses:

1. There is no significant difference between the means of traditional and nontraditional students in learning styles as measured by the GALT (Rodrangki, et.al., 1983.)

2. There is no significant difference between the means of traditional and nontraditional students as to their anxiety levels as measured on the General Anxiety Scale (Sarason, 1961.)

3. There is no significant difference between the means of traditional and nontraditional students as to their selection of positive coping techniques as measured by the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997.)

4. There is no significant difference between the means of traditional and nontraditional students as to their selection of negative coping techniques as measured by the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997.)

5. There is no significant difference between the means of traditional and nontraditional students designated as Formal learners on the GALT (Rodrangki, et.al., 1983) as to their anxiety levels as measured on the General Anxiety Scale (Sarason, 1961.)

6. There is no significant difference between the means of traditional and nontraditional students designated as Transitional learners on the GALT (Rodrangki, et.al., 1983) as to their anxiety levels as measured on the General Anxiety Scale (Sarason, 1961.)

7. There is no significant difference between the means of traditional and nontraditional students designated as Concrete learners on the GALT (Rodrangki, et.al., 1983) as to their anxiety levels as measured on the General Anxiety Scale (Sarason, 1961.)

8. There is no significant difference between the means of traditional and nontraditional students designated as Formal learners on the GALT (Rodrangki, et.al., 1983) as to their selection of positive coping techniques when measured on the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997.)

9. There is no significant difference between the means of traditional and nontraditional students designated as Transitional learners on the GALT (Rodrangki, et.al., 1983) as to their selection of positive coping techniques when measured on the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997.)

10. There is no significant difference between the means of traditional and nontraditional students designated as Concrete learners on the GALT (Rodrangki, et.al., 1983) as to their selection of positive coping techniques when measured on the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997.)

11. There is no significant difference between the means of traditional and nontraditional students designated as Formal learners on the GALT (Rodrangki, et.al., 1983) as to their selection of negative coping techniques when measured on the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997.)

12. There is no significant difference between the means of traditional and nontraditional students designated and Transitional learners on the GALT (Rodrangki, et.al., 1983) as to their selection of negative coping techniques when measured on the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997.)

13. There is no significant difference between the means of traditional and nontraditional students designated as Concrete learners on the GALT (Rodrangki, et.al., 1983) as to their selection of negative coping techniques when measured on the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997.)

14. There is no correlation between student's learning style as identified on the GALT (Rodrangki, et.al., 1983) and the student's anxiety level as identified in the General Anxiety Scale (Sarason, 1961) in either traditional or nontraditional students.

15. There is no correlation between student's learning style as identified on the GALT (Rodrangki, et.al., 1983) and student's negative coping techniques in either traditional or nontraditional students.

16. There is no correlation between student's learning styles as designated on the GALT (Rodrangki, et.al., 1983) and student's positive coping techniques as designated on the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997.)

17. There is no correlation between student's anxiety levels as designated by the General Anxiety Scale (Sarason, 1961) and negative coping techniques as designated by the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997.)

18. There is no correlation between student's anxiety levels as designated by the General Anxiety Scale (Sarason, 1961) and positive coping techniques as designated by the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997.)

Discussion

The study involving traditional and non traditional styles, anxiety level and use of positive and negative coping techniques was enlightening. Results of the statistical analyses are given in the tables in appendix C. The GALT (Rodrangki, et,al., 1983), which categories students learning styles as formal, transitional or concrete reveled that five of the traditional students and two of the nontraditional students were formal learners. Five of the traditional students and four of the non-traditional students were designated as transitional learners. All of the remaining students were concrete learners, nine traditional and seven nontraditional.

In analyzing the data the correlation coefficient formula was used at the .05 level of significance (Ellis, 1975.) IN analyzing traditional learners a significant correlation (-.8089) was found between formal learners high anxiety levels and their use of negative coping techniques as measured by the Coping Techniques Questionnaire (Price, 1997.) Negative techniques are detected by questions 1, 2, 3, 7, 11, 15, 16, 17, and 18; positive techniques by questions 5, 6, 8,

9, 10, 12, 13, 14, and 19; questions 4 and 20 are neutral. The null hypothesis (hypothesis 11) regarding students anxiety levels and negative coping techniques is rejected.

Transitional learners displayed a positive correlation between anxiety levels and negative coping skills; therefore the null hypothesis regarding this relationship is rejected (hypothesis 12.)

Traditional students designated as concrete learners had a significant correlation between concrete learning style and the use of negative coping skills (.7928). The null hypothesis regarding this relationship is rejected (hypothesis 15.)

There were no other significant differences indicated in traditional students learning styles, anxiety levels and coping skills therefore the null hypothesis regarding these are not rejected.

Nontraditional students designated as formal learners had significant correlations in all areas therefore the null hypotheses are rejected.

Nontraditional students who were transitional learners showed no significant differences, therefore the null hypotheses were not rejected.

One aspect of this study revealed a high number of both traditional and nontraditional concrete learners. More attention needs to be given in instructing these learners. The concrete learners had more anxiety and used more negative coping skills.

Coping techniques training could be beneficial to most community college students both traditional and nontraditional. Further investigation is indicated.

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Appendix A

GENERAL ANXIETY SCALE (GAS)
BY
SARASON

Write T for True statements and F for False statements.

1. I freeze up in a competitive situation.

2. I worry about my mental health more than do most people.

3. I worry about my social adjustment more than do most people.

4. I am high-strung person.

5. I wish I could be as happy as others seem to be.

6. I don't seem to be able to control worrying about something even when I know there is no basis for it.

7. I practically never blush.

8. When I have to talk to a group I get very anxious.

9. I am usually calm and not easily upset.

10. I perspire a lot when I am with a group of strangers.

11. I sometimes get so excited that I find it hard to get to sleep.

12. When I go to the doctor I worry that he will tell me that something is wrong with me.

13. I am inclined to take things hard.

14. I have had periods in which I have lost sleep over worry.

15. I have been afraid of things or people that I know could not hurt me.

16. I am easily embarrassed.

17. I have periods of such restlessness that I cannot sit long in a chair.

Appendix B

COPING TECHNIQUES QUESTIONNAIRE

BY

ELSA C. PRICE, Ed. D.

September 8, 1997

SCALE:

0= NEVER 1= RARELY 2= OCCASIONALLY

3= FREQUENTLY 4= ALWAYS/ CONSTANTLY N/A= DOES NOT APPLY

1. When may plans have to be changed I get very angry.
2. When I am upset I keep it to myself.
3. When my family causes me stress, I often shout or yell.
4. I talk in a quiet voice when I am upset.
5. If my plan "A" doesn't work then I move into plan "B" without getting irritated.
6. A warm bath helps me to relax when I have had a stressful day at work or school.
7. I rarely take time for myself because of my schedule.
8. Listening to quiet, slow music help me to relax.
9. When I have had a stressful day, I can forget everything by working on one of my hobbies.
10. Walking helps me to relax.
11. I find a lot of good things to eat when I am upset.
12. Reading for pleasure helps me to relax.
13. When I have had a stressful day, I can unwind by getting in a quiet room to pray, meditate or think about pleasant things.
14. I like to workout at the gym or participate in an aerobics class to upwind from a stressful day.
15. Often I have to take an aspirin or similar medication to relax or reduce tension headaches.
16. I find that I smoke more when I am "stressed out."
17. I can't relax long enough to unwind at the end of the day.
18. I get very angry when there is too much stress in my life.
19. Taking a deep breath and letting it out slowly helps to calm me when I get upset.
20. The methods that I use to handle the stressors in my life are working well for me.

Appendix C

TABLE 1
TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

I. FORMAL LEARNERS

	GALT	GAS	Coping Negative	Coping Positive
N=5				
Mean	9.4	7.6	19	20.6
Variance	2.3	7.3	26.5	7.3
Standard Deviation	1.5166	2.702	5.1478	2.7019

II. TRANSITIONAL LEARNERS

	GALT	GAS	Coping Negative	Coping Positive
N=5				
Mean	5.8	7.6	13.8	25
Variance	.2	7.30	20.7	52
Standard Deviation	.4472	2.7019	4.5497	7.2111

III. CONCRETE LEARNERS

	GALT	GAS	Coping Negative	Coping Positive
N=9				
Mean	2.777	9.667	16.889	21.333
Variance	1.6887	12.7498	35.425	42.251
Standard Deviation	1.2995	3.571	5.952	6.500

IV. COMBINED

	GALT	GAS	Coping Negative	Coping Positive
N=				
Mean				
Variance				
Standard Deviation				

TABLE 2
NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

I. FORMAL LEARNERS

	GALT	GAS	Coping Negative	Coping Positive
N=2				
Mean	10.5	5	12	23.5
Variance	.50	2	2	24.50
Standard Deviation	.7071	1.4142	1.4142	4.9497

II. TRANSITIONAL LEARNERS

	GALT	GAS	Coping Negative	Coping Positive
N=4				
Mean	5.5	8.0	15.25	21.5
Variance	1.0	12.6667	16.9375	23
Standard Deviation	1.0	3.5590	4.1155	4.7958

III. CONCRETE LEARNERS

	GALT	GAS	Coping Negative	Coping Positive
N=7				
Mean	2.875	7.143	13.429	20.143
Variance	1.1429	6.47687	8.8402	86.9035
Standard Deviation	1.0695	2.54497	2.9733	9.3222

IV. COMBINED (TOTAL)

	GALT	GAS	Coping Negative	Coping Positive
N=13				
Mean	4.846	7.077	13.769	21.077
Variance	103.3618	7.5769	14.35897	28.2939
Standard Deviation	10.1667	2.7526	3.7893	5.3192

TABLE 3
PEARSON'S CORRELATION COEFFICIENT

TRADITIONAL STUDENTS

I. FORMAL LEARNERS

CORRELATION BETWEEN	RANGE FOR r (+1 TO -1)
(N=5) r .05=.811	
A) Formal learning style and positive coping skills	.7199
B) Formal learning style and negative coping skills	.6084
C) Formal learning style and anxiety levels	-.7443
D) Anxiety levels and positive coping skills	-.27123
E) Anxiety levels and negative coping skills	.8089*

II. TRANSITIONAL LEARNERS

(N=5) r.05=.811	
A) Transitional learning styles and positive coping skills	-.6977
B) Transitional learning styles and negative coping skills	.2212
C) Transitional learning styles and anxiety level	.1742
D) Anxiety levels and positive coping skills	.1933
E) Anxiety levels and negative coping skills	.8901*

III. CONCRETE LEARNERS

(N=9) r.05=.632	
A) Concrete learning styles and positive coping skills	-.26867
B) Concrete learning styles and negative coping skills	.7928*
C) Concrete learning styles and anxiety level	.0945
D) Anxiety level and positive coping skills	-.2712
E) Anxiety level and negative coping skills	.4121

IV. COMBINED

(N=19) r.05=.444	
A) Learning styles and positive coping skills	.00002
B) Learning styles and negative coping skills	.0387
C) Learning styles and anxiety levels	.0953
D) Anxiety levels and positive coping skills	.31297
E) Anxiety levels and negative coping skills	.0063

*significant

TABLE 4
PEARSON'S CORRELATION COEFFICIENT

NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS

I. FORMAL LEARNERS

CORRELATION BETWEEN	RANGE FOR r
(N=2) r .05=.997	(+1 TO -1)
A) Formal learning style and positive coping skills	-1.0*
B) Formal learning style and negative coping skills	-1.0*
C) Formal learning style and anxiety level	-1.0*
D) Anxiety levels and positive coping skills	1.0*
E) Anxiety levels and negative coping skills	1.0*

II. TRANSITIONAL LEARNERS

(N=4) r.05=.878	
A) Transitional learning styles and positive coping skills	.0695
B) Transitional learning styles and negative coping skills	.6079
C) Transitional learning styles and anxiety level	.5620
D) Anxiety levels and positive coping skills	.1366
E) Anxiety levels and negative coping skills	.64135

III. CONCRETE LEARNERS

(N=7) r .05=.707	
A) Concrete learning styles and positive coping skills	.3547
B) Concrete learning styles and negative coping skills	.2787
C) Concrete learning styles and anxiety level	.2538
D) Anxiety levels and positive coping skills	-.9484*
E) Anxiety levels and negative coping skills	.6414

*significant